

## Jesus Christ's Ascension

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We've made it to the 49<sup>th</sup> day of the count. However, for this message, we are going to mentally rewind to the 40<sup>th</sup> day. The events of the 40<sup>th</sup> day of the count to Pentecost in the year of Christ's resurrection are some of the most significant in the New Testament, on par with the crucifixion and resurrection because of what they accomplished and opened to us. So, today we will study the 40<sup>th</sup> day and the things that it set into motion.

We will begin in Acts 1, if you would turn there:

**Acts 1:1-3** The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

The book of Acts was written by Luke, and the "former account" he mentions was Luke's gospel. The former account ends with the day Christ was taken up, which came after He had given commandments or instructions to the apostles, and we will see that a bit later.

Luke also fills in details here that during the period of 40 days, Jesus showed Himself to the apostles and others. When we piece together all that is written about Christ after His resurrection, we find around 10 instances of His appearing to His disciples over 40 days.

Yet there is a notable change that took place in the relationship between Jesus and the apostles after His resurrection. For three and half years, He had been with them constantly. Wherever He went, they went, with brief exceptions when He would separate Himself for a time to pray, or when He

sent them across the Sea of Galilee and later joined them by walking on water. But in general, they were hardly ever separated.

But after His resurrection, that changed. He was no longer tied to them, as it were. His thoughts and His works were less focused on the apostles. As He said in His prayer the night before His crucifixion, He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4). He said it again with His dying breath: “It is finished” (John 19:30).

The purpose for which He had been sent was complete. Thus, after His resurrection, He oriented Himself toward the next significant step, which was His return to His Father. So, Christ would appear to the apostles and others, and speak of things about the Kingdom, but then He would leave again. He was with them sometimes, but not most of the time.

In this way, it was as though He was in the process of going away, of returning to the Father, of ascending (John 20:17), but it was drawn out over 40 days. When He finally did ascend on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, His departure was visible. And because the apostles witnessed it, they understood its finality. They knew it was the last time. When He disappeared out of sight on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, they knew He would not appear again until His return at the end.

But that is getting ahead of the story. We will continue reading in verse 4:

**Acts 1:4-5** And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Christ gives them a specific command that they needed to wait in Jerusalem. And He also tells them why: because they were going to receive the Holy Spirit.

As we know, on the previous Passover evening, He told them that He had to go away before He could send the Comforter. After His resurrection, in John 20:22, He had breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit,” but it

appears that was simply a foretaste because here He tells them they needed to wait for the Promise of the Father, meaning it was still ahead. As we know, that took place on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, on Pentecost, as a fulfillment of several prophecies (Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; 39:29; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; 59:21).

Those who were familiar with the Scriptures knew that God had promised that He would give His Spirit to many, and Jesus was telling the apostles that that remarkable occurrence lay just ahead. But they had to wait for it in Jerusalem because something had to happen first. He still had to go to His Father before He could send the Holy Spirit.

Picking it up in verse 6:

**Acts 1:6-8** Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Since Jesus had been speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom, and since He had also mentioned the soon-coming of the Holy Spirit—which some prophecies link to the restoration of Israel—it makes sense that the apostles would ask if the kingdom of Israel was about to be restored. They still didn’t have the complete picture, but their question is understandable. They were trying to piece together what was happening and what would happen next.

Christ told them that the timing was entirely in the Father’s purview. He said earlier that even He did not know. Instead of focusing on the timing of events, He told them that after they had received the Holy Spirit, they would be empowered to be witnesses of Him. They would be given the same Spirit that motivated and animated Jesus Himself. That Spirit imparts spiritual knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It impels a person toward holiness. It is a Spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. It’s not just that the apostles

would be preaching about Christ and His message. Yes, they were witnesses in that way. But the apostles would be growing in Christ's image, and that is where the real witness would be made: men living as God lives. That is a greater testimony than any spoken word.

And now verse 9:

**Acts 1:9-12** Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

And so, on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, He ascended visibly. He foretold this in John 6:62, when some of the disciples stumbled over His statements about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. He answered, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend [to] where He was before?"—meaning, back to heaven.

The mention of the cloud in verse 9 is noteworthy. It is the same Greek word used to describe the divine cloud that overshadowed them at the Transfiguration and from which they heard a voice from heaven. It is also used for the cloud that led the Israelites. Also, every description of Christ's return mentions that He will come on the clouds of heaven.

Clouds come in various shapes and sizes, but I have a hard time believing this was a puffy little white cloud that received Him and carried Him out of sight. This was a cloud befitting of power and strength and honor and glory and blessing. This was a cloud for a King.

His ascension was impossible to miss. His return to the Father was, I am sure, something they never forgot.

The two angels testified that His return will be in the same manner, and this is important for us to keep in mind because, again, all the references to Christ's return speak of His return being very visible. It won't be done in secret. He even warns in the Olivet Prophecy that there will be attempts to deceive people into believing that He had secretly returned. So, we are warned ahead of time that His return, just like His ascension, won't be secret.

Two of the gospels also mention the ascension, so we will look at those as we continue to add pieces to this picture. Please turn to Luke 24:

**Luke 24:44-53** Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

This is the very end of the "former account" that Luke mentions in Acts 1. Verse 50 says Jesus "led them out as far as Bethany." It could also be translated as "the vicinity of Bethany." Let's think about the geography here. You have probably seen maps of the area around Jerusalem. If you can picture this in your mind, directly east of the Temple Mount is the Mount of Olives. The Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives are separated by the Brook Kidron and the Kidron Valley, which runs north to south there (more or less).

Now, we saw in Acts 1 that the apostles returned to Jerusalem after Christ's ascension from "the mount called Olivet." So, He ascended from somewhere on the Mount of Olives, which is a pretty big area. But verse 50 here says Jesus led them out somewhere near Bethany before He ascended. Bethany was on a southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives. So, the ascension took place from a slope of Olivet, in the area of Bethany.

But we can add a bit more to our mental map. The Garden of Gethsemane was also on Olivet. It was down near the edge of the Kidron Valley. Christ's crucifixion was also on Olivet, because that is the only location where the centurion by Him at His death could have seen the veil of the Temple, which faced east, being torn in two. In addition, it is highly likely that Golgotha, the place of Christ's burial, was on Olivet. This, in turn, means His appearance to Mary and the other women after His resurrection would have been on this mount. So, Olivet—this general area—was highly significant in the final months of Christ's time on earth, culminating in His ascension from it. And Zechariah 14:4 indicates that the Mount of Olives is where Christ's feet will touch down when He returns, splitting the mount in two. Christ seems to be very closely connected to this general area.

Now we will look at Mark's version, which is much shorter, but which contains a detail that ties Christ's ascension to well over a dozen other passages:

**Mark 16:19-20** So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Mark's account says that after Christ ascended, He sat down at the right hand of God. That is probably not new to anybody—we have heard it countless times. But when you see what the other Bible writers link that with, it becomes almost overwhelming what Christ's ascension on the 40<sup>th</sup> day set into motion, and what it has opened up for us. So, just remember that He sat down at the right hand of God after He was received up to heaven.

Next, we will look at what appears to be a continuation of where Luke and Mark left off. Daniel recorded a vision of what happened after Christ could no longer be seen by the apostles. Please turn to Daniel 7:

**Daniel 7:13-14** “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

As I said, this seems to pick right up from the accounts of Christ’s ascension. He comes with the clouds of heaven and is brought to the Ancient of Days. The phrase, “brought Him near” can indicate being presented, which fits quite well. He was presented, and then dominion and glory and a kingdom were given to Him. Perhaps this is why Christ kept speaking to the apostles about things pertaining to the Kingdom (Acts 1:3), and why they asked Him if He was about to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). This vision was recorded well in advance, and thus, the apostles should have known that when He returned to His Father (as He said He would), what is in this vision is what awaited Him. He would receive dominion and glory and a kingdom. The apostles were hopeful that His earthly reign would begin right away, but there was much more that must be worked out first.

We will keep going. There are several prophetic and Messianic psalms that also refer to this pivotal event. We will look at two very clear Psalms because they foretell some of what would happen when the Christ ascended:

**Psalms 68:18** You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the LORD God might dwell there.

Where it says, “You have received gifts among men,” the Hebrew word translated “received,” is multi-faceted. It generally means “to take,” but in

some cases, it means, “to receive something for another person.” In other words, it implies receiving for the purpose of then giving. In this case, it means “You received gifts for men” rather than “among men.”

The imagery here is of a conquering king. In ancient times, defeated kings and generals would be tied behind the chariot of the victor and forced to walk in a procession. In this way, being led indicated being defeated.

Here, Christ is the One leading the captives, and the one defeated is captivity itself. Think of Christ’s mission statement about proclaiming liberty to the captives and setting at liberty those who were oppressed. It is talking about spiritual bondage—captivity to Satan and to sin. And when He ascended, Jesus led captivity itself away captive. It was defeated.

In those ancient victory processions, the victor would often throw money into the crowds. That is, he received gifts through his victory, but he also then distributed those gifts.

The end of verse 18 gives the reason for leading captivity captive and giving gifts: It is so the LORD God might dwell there. Christ did this so that He and the Father would have a dwelling place. He liberates from Satan and from sin so He can dwell in the former captives. This is what Christ talked about during the Passover before His crucifixion. He said, “We [meaning, the Father and the Son] will come to him and make Our home with him,” referring to the one who loves the King and keeps His word (John 14:23). He had to ascend victorious—which He did—and show the foes conquered, which we will also see, and then He would give gifts so He and Father would have a place to dwell.

In terms of gifts, the Holy Spirit is the one we typically think of, and that was poured out on Pentecost after the ascension. But Paul draws on this psalm about Christ’s ascension to show another one. Please turn to Ephesians 4:

**Ephesians 4:7-11** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first

descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Paul quotes Psalm 68 and then he explains Christ's descent—meaning His burial—followed by His later ascension above the heavens. Paul's overall purpose is to teach that each one of us has received gifts because of Christ's victorious ascension.

Paul says that a gifting was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift—what He received because of His victory. Beginning in verse 11, Paul then lists various roles or responsibilities within the Body. Notice the progression in Paul's wording: Christ ascended on high, He gave gifts to men, and He Himself gave some to be apostles, prophets, and so forth.

This was a deliberate act by the Head of the church. If we would continue reading, we would see that those roles are how He ordained that we all come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Son of God. He tells us how He organizes the church and how He works.

Paul goes on to say that the gifting is for the edification of the Body. That is, He gave those specific responsibilities—those gifts—to some as a gift to the whole church. That fits with the final line in Psalm 68:18. Remember, Christ gives these gifts so that the LORD God has a place to dwell. Those offices are part of the gifting Christ gives to make the spiritual Body a fitting abode or dwelling place.

Now we will go back to the psalms and see a second one that relates to the ascension. Psalm 110. Remember what we saw in Mark 16, that when Christ was received up into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God:

**Psalm 110:1** The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."

This relates to the vision in Daniel we saw, in which the Son of Man was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. Here we have the Father telling

Him to sit at His right hand till He makes His enemies His footstool. The verses that follow also speak about the rod of strength, of rulership, and of executing kings in the day of His wrath. As we know, those things are still awaiting fulfillment.

So, after Jesus ascended, He was given the place of honor at the Father's right hand. It also implies ruling with Him. In other words, He did not just sit down—He was enthroned. His dominion and kingdom became official, we could say. Of course, when He was a Man, He represented the Kingdom, and He was recognized as a King even as a baby. But this psalm, plus the vision we saw in Daniel, indicates that something changed when He ascended and sat down at the Father's right hand.

At least part of what changed was His experience as a Man that qualified Him for an even greater role than He had before. Revelation 3:21 alludes to this. It says, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as [Christ says] I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." He had to overcome—He had to be victorious—before He could sit down with His Father.

But verse 1 also introduces the idea that He is waiting for something—waiting until His enemies are made His footstool. There is a great pause of unknown length before all the enemies are completely subjugated. And so, even as Christ is enthroned now at the Father's right hand, the story is not over. They are looking forward to a future victory, just as we are. That is what verse 5 talks about—His execution of rebellious kings in that future victory.

This teaches that Christ's ascension was a line in the sand. It marked the end of one manner of operation and the beginning of another. Prior to Christ's incarnation as a human baby, He met with many Old Testament figures—with Adam and Eve, with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and others. But once He ascended and sat down, He has not and will not leave His Father's right hand until He is sent back.

This is explained in Acts 3:20-21. It says that the Father will "send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all

His holy prophets since the world began.” It means that once “heaven” received Him, Christ would be waiting until the time when He would put down rebellion and restore things. He wouldn’t be popping down to earth and back up—He would simply remain with the Father until He returns visibly and with clouds.

Now, there is one more highly significant part of this psalm, which is verse 4:

**Psalm 110:4-5** The LORD has sworn and will not relent, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.

At first glance, this reference to a Priest may seem out of place because everything else has been about kingship after Christ’s enthronement. But this psalm foretells that David’s Lord would also be a Priest—the ultimate Priest. This was not possible in Israel, where the kings descended from David, who was of the tribe of Judah, and the priestly line was of the tribe of Levi, and more specifically, of the house of Aaron. But the One sitting down would also be a Priest. The two roles would be combined in the Messiah.

We will see another prophecy of this in Zechariah 6, if you would turn there:

**Zechariah 6:11-13** Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: “Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”’

In the Levitical priesthood, the high priest wore a turban, and over or around the turban was a small crown. The front of that crown had a plate on it that read, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD.” Part of the role of the high priest was to wear this crown and plate so the sacrifices of Israel would be accepted before God (Exodus 28:36-38).

But here a new crown is made for the high priest, and with it comes a prophecy of the Messiah (the BRANCH) who will be a Priest on His throne. Levitical priests did not have a throne. But the Messiah would be both King and Priest.

Hebrews makes it clear that on earth as a Man, Jesus was not a priest (Hebrews 7:11-14), even though we can discern some priest-like elements in His ministry. But when Jesus ascended and was told to sit at the Father's right hand, it was tied to being given this new role of the Ruling Priest.

We will see more of Christ's priesthood later, but now we will go back in thought to the prophecy that after He ascended, He gave gifts. We saw one aspect of that in the ministry, but now we will look at how Christ's gifting was manifested on Pentecost. Please turn to Acts 2. Notice how this ties together Christ's gifting with His sitting at the Father's right hand:

**Acts 2:29-36** "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This was in Peter's Pentecost sermon. He had to explain to those assembled what was happening, and specifically the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that caused the dramatic events of that day.

Notice that Peter points out that what happened on Pentecost was a consequence of Jesus having been exalted to the right hand of God. Jesus received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, and He then gave gifts—especially that Spirit—to men. As it says, “He poured out this which you now see and hear.” So, the manifestation of the Spirit was evidence of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father, and of God having made Him “both Lord and Christ,” meaning, “the Anointed One.” The events of the day were proof of who Jesus was and the position He held at the Father’s right hand. Thus, Pentecost for the church follows on the heels of Christ’s ascension, exaltation, and sitting down.

The apostles testify of this again when they were on trial a short time later:

**Acts 5:27-32** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

The apostles were in trouble with the religious leaders of the nation for preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. As we see, the leaders feared the reaction of the people more than they feared God. They were afraid of the apostles’ message and what it could lead to.

The apostles answered with clear conviction that their first duty was to God rather than man. They proceeded to testify that the Man whom the leaders had crucified by the Romans had been raised up, and God had exalted Him to His right hand—again, a position of honor and rulership. The council knew the scriptures that we have gone through and knew exactly what the apostles meant.

The apostles kept piling on, adding that Jesus was also Prince and Savior (meaning Deliverer), and that He could give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We, who are called by God, see repentance and forgiveness as wonderful things, but for the council, this declaration was highly offensive. You'll notice in verse 33 that the council members were furious and made plans to kill the apostles.

They understood that only God could give forgiveness. You might remember that when Jesus healed the paralytic and told him his sins were forgiven, the people nearby said that He blasphemed (Matthew 9:3). So, when the apostles bring up forgiveness of sins, the leaders were ready to blow their tops because they simply could not accept Who Jesus was. It would cost them too much to accept Jesus as the Christ and accept His message. The mental adjustments needed were too great. The council members were profoundly threatened by this upstart movement that they could not control and which they had already decided could not possibly be correct.

The apostles continued to pour salt into the wounds by saying they were His witnesses to these things. Yet it is interesting to consider just how visible Christ's ascension on the 40<sup>th</sup> day may have been. Remember the geography we went through. The ascension was from somewhere on the Mount of Olives, which was elevated.

His ascension may have been quite public—visible not only to the apostles, but also to anyone in Jerusalem who happened to be looking in the direction of Olivet. Again, the biblical usage of clouds suggests this was a significant sight and not private at all. Thus, it is possible some on the council were witnesses as well, or at the very least had heard about it. But even so, they still weren't willing to make the connection and accept the truth.

The apostles also said the Holy Spirit was a witness. Again, the council members knew that the outpouring of the Spirit was prophesied, and they had undoubtedly heard of the events on Pentecost. But the apostles might as well have slapped them in the face when they said the Holy Spirit was given to those who obey God. The apostles were saying that they had received the Spirit because they were obedient to God, and the council members had

missed out on this promise because of their rebellion. They had missed out on this gift that was given to some as a result of the Messiah, the Anointed One, ascending.

So, we've seen how the prophecies of ascending and sitting and giving gifts were fulfilled, and now we will move on to Christ's role as the Priest on His throne. This is a major theme of the book of Hebrews, if you would start turning there.

As a refresher, Hebrews was written to a group of believers whose faith was weakening through apathy and neglect because of the increasing pressure of their times. We can probably all relate. The author wrote to reorient his audience to the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ, because they were going to need—indeed, they already needed—the spiritual strength that only comes from a deepening relationship with Him.

Part of what the author had to set straight was that the system of worship that centered on the Temple and the Levitical priesthood had been superseded by Christ's priesthood. Jesus as Priest at the Father's right hand forms the backbone of this book, and it also provides tremendous encouragement for us, as we will see. As we go through this, notice how often the author refers to Christ's place at the Father's right hand.

We will begin in verse 1:

**Hebrews 1:1-4** God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

This opening salvo immediately puts the focus on the Son of God as the Messenger, the Heir of all things, the Creator and the Sustainer. This was to remind the audience of what and whom they had been neglecting through focusing on lesser things.

Verse 3 contains two distinct actions: Jesus purged our sins and He sat down at the right hand of the Most High. Notice that even though these two actions are mentioned one after the other, there was a space of time between them. His sitting down—His enthronement— did not happen immediately after He purged our sins.

If you look at passages that relate to His ascension, you will notice that it is common for His death and ascension (or His resurrection and ascension) to be listed in this way. It is a scriptural pattern to be aware of—that there can be significant gaps of time between events that are listed in the same verse or in adjacent verses (see Isaiah 61:2; Zechariah 9:9-10).

But what we see here is another consequence of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. He had been made a little lower than the angels, but with His ascension, He was plainly declared to be greater than the angels. His enthronement as heir of all things gives Him a position far above everyone else except the Father.

Hold your place here in Hebrews, and please turn to Ephesians 1:

**Ephesians 1:19-23** and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Notice the similarities to Hebrews 1, with the mention of His inheritance, as well as His superiority above all principality and power. That refers to

angelic and demonic powers. In His position at the Father's right hand, ruling with Him, and being heir of all things, Christ is far above everything in the spirit realm, whether good or evil.

This passage also brings us into the inheritance that became His when He ascended and sat down. This is tied to the hope of our calling, as well as the overwhelming Power that is now working on our behalf if we will believe and yield to Him. The same power that resurrected Christ and later told Him to sit at His right hand is working in us. And He has bestowed the full measure of authority to the Son to be Head of the church.

This should remind us that the Government of God is in heaven, not in an earthly headquarters. Christ as the Head means that He governs the church according to what is good in His sight, even if it doesn't always make sense to us. It is not always going to be smooth sailing. On the contrary, there is always going to be a measure of turmoil. Yet the Head still has it all in hand.

Again, He is far above—He sees everything, knowing the end from the beginning. He knows what is necessary to get those who are His to the place He wants them to be. So, like with Israel in the wilderness, the route and the circumstances may seem quite dire to us, but this indicates we are viewing things carnally. When we remember and are convicted of Christ's headship of the church, we should be greatly encouraged. He is leading us just as surely as He led Israel. We just don't have the benefit of being able to see the pillar of cloud and fire. Instead, we have been given the gift of faith as a lens, but we must remember to use it.

We will see another example of Christ's superiority over the spirit world before returning to Hebrews:

**I Peter 3:21-22** There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Again, we see that because Jesus was seated at the right hand of God, all the angels and authorities and powers are subject to Him. This does not mean that He had no authority before, because even while He was a Man, the demons were subject to Him. But something changed with His ascension—something was accomplished that elevated the Word even higher than He was before His incarnation.

Now, let's think about Christ's ascension as a contrast to another ascension—that of Helel, the covering cherub who became Satan. In Isaiah 14, God tells us what was in his heart. He said in his heart,

**Isaiah 14:13-14** “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.”

First, notice the similarities with Christ's ascension. Christ's ascension also involved a throne above the stars, which can be a reference to angels. Jesus ascended above the heights of the clouds, and He was seated at the right hand of the Most High.

But at the same time, the contrast could hardly be greater. Christ's ascension was the Father's doing, not done out of self will. Also, Jesus did not exalt Himself—He was exalted by the Father, as it says in Acts. And Jesus was not trying to be like the Most High in terms of trying to be the Most High. Instead, Jesus was and is like the Most High in terms of character and nature, but He readily accepted a position under the Most High, which Helel was not willing to do. Unlike Christ, Helel tried to ascend on his own terms and for his own reasons. But rather than exalting him, God says to him, “you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.” The question of supremacy has been settled. Jesus has been given a name far above every name, and above every principality and power.

Please turn back to Hebrews 1. We began in verses 1-4, and now we will just glance at verse 13. The author quotes Psalm 110, which we read. You can

see how this all ties together. The author points out that God only told the Son to sit at His right hand. He did not say that to any angel. If we want to talk to the One who wields the power, we need to seek the Son.

We will move on to chapter 4:

**Hebrews 4:14-16** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It says our High Priest passed through the heavens, which is reminiscent of Daniel's vision of the Son of Man being brought with the clouds of heaven. As a result of His ascension, He is not just a King, but a Priest, ruling on His throne.

This section also makes Christ's ascension and what it set into motion very meaningful for us. Because He has passed through the heavens—because of what He accomplished and His exaltation by the Father—we have every reason to hold fast our confession of faith in Him. In other words, because we have this ruling High Priest, who is seated in the place of honor by the Father, and who experienced life like His creation and who understands the temptations and trials of human life, we have solid ground for holding fast and enduring, knowing and trusting that this exalted One is working on our behalf continually.

In verse 16, we are told to come boldly to the throne of grace so we can obtain mercy and other gifts to help us in our times of need. We can have boldness because of Christ's present work as our Advocate and Intercessor. He is more dedicated than we can imagine to His work of completing us so we can spend eternity with Them, which means He will give whatever is needed to make that happen, including His own life.

We are part of the heavenly reality now, but it is so easy to forget about it because we cannot see it physically, and the pressures of life discourage us

from thinking about it. But it is exactly what we do need to think about because the Father and Son are the only ones who can give the strength and the mercy and whatever is required in our times of need.

Let's move on to chapter 5, which has a couple more references to Psalm 110:

**Hebrews 5:5-10** So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek"; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek."

Hebrews 5 contrasts human priests with Jesus Christ as High Priest. Verse 5 continues the point from earlier in the chapter that the high priesthood is only by appointment by God. The human high priest did not put himself forward for appointment. Likewise, the author points out that Jesus did not glorify or exalt Himself in order to be High Priest. That office was given to Him by the Most High.

In verses 5-6, the author quotes Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 to show that Someone greater—the Most High—commanded things regarding Jesus, including His role as High Priest. That shows that Jesus did not glorify Himself to step into that role—it was presented to Him. Remember our contrast with Helel, who did glorify and exalt himself in his determination to ascend to a position to which he had not been appointed.

Along those lines, James says that self-seeking is an aspect of demonic wisdom (James 3:14-16), meaning it is a skill the unclean spirits have and use, as exemplified by Satan. It is part of his spirit, and it shows up in selfish ambition, which is one of the works of the flesh. But Christ's approach is completely opposite. He waited for the Father to raise Him up.

But getting back to Christ becoming High Priest, verse 8 says that it was through His sufferings that He was made complete and fully ready to be the sort of Priest that is needed for this New Covenant.

Notice that His role has not been static but has grown—it has branched out—as God’s plan unfolded. For instance, the Word is not spoken of as always having been a Son, but at some point, God said, “...this day I have begotten You,” and He became the Son.

Similarly, Hebrews 5:9 says that He became the author of eternal salvation, yet that was after He fulfilled the work the Father had given Him to do. There were certain things that the Most High and the Word predetermined must take place. The Word, of course, has always been without flaw, but the plan required that He “learn obedience” through suffering, which is another way of describing His expanding role.

When verse 9 says that He was “perfected,” it does not imply that He was ever morally imperfect. The word “perfect” has the meaning of “complete.” He had to be completed through living a sinless human life, and undergoing all that we do, so that He could become our Advocate and Intercessor.

Similarly, in saying that "He learned obedience," the author does not mean that He was in any way disobedient before. Jesus said clearly and truthfully that He always did what pleased the Father (John 8:29). He obeyed God in every possible way. Learning obedience means that Jesus learned what it means to obey even while suffering. He had to learn fully what it was like to continue to submit to God's will even while undergoing unfair, unjust, and intense pain and hardship.

He became personally acquainted with sufferings to a degree that none of His spiritual brothers and sisters ever will. But in doing so, He became perfect for the job of High Priest because He now has the experience to build and maintain the bridge between God and suffering man. He can now intercede before the Father on our behalf with personal understanding. By knowing what it is like for a human being to follow the will of God even

under the greatest trials of heart and body, He personifies the voice of experience before God's throne and is thus able to mediate for us. He is perfect for the job.

If you would turn over to chapter 8, we will see that the author keeps coming back to Christ as the Priest at the right hand of the Father:

**Hebrews 8:1** Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

We'll move on to chapter 9, which is about the earthly sanctuary and specifically what the Levitical high priest did on the Day of Atonement.

**Hebrews 9:11-12** But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

This shows Christ's role as High Priest in fulfilling the Day of Atonement. It also shows Christ's fulfillment of the first goat and the bullock for the high priest. Their blood was pure because no hands were laid on them and no sins were confessed (Leviticus 16:15). That undefiled blood was the only blood allowed into the Holy of Holies. Here it says that Christ, who never entered the earthly Holy of Holies as a Man, entered the heavenly Holy of Holies with His own blood.

Dropping down to verse 23:

**Hebrews 9:23-24** Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Christ's entering the heavenly Most Holy Place and cleansing it with His own blood is a foundational event. While it does not specifically say this happened on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, this fulfillment is at least a consequence of what the 40<sup>th</sup> day set into motion because Christ is only shown as High Priest in the context of being seated at God's right hand, ruling as a Priest on His throne, and we know His sitting down happened after His ascension.

Moving on to chapter 10:

**Hebrews 10:12-14** But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

The author keeps coming back to this central action of Christ sitting down at God's right hand. Notice also that he mentions Christ's waiting. He is no longer in a mode where He appears to His servants and then disappears again. Once He sat down, He has been waiting until the culmination of this age, and then—as it says in Hebrews 9:28—He will appear a second time. But up until that second appearance, He is waiting.

Please turn over to chapter 12:

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Christ's ascension is incredibly meaningful for us. Here the author uses it as the basis of his exhortation to these Hebrews whose faith and zeal and confidence had been slipping. He points out that they (and we) have powerful examples of people acting with trust in God. But even though we have the examples in the previous chapter, the author tells us where our focus should be. He says, "looking unto Jesus," and proceeds to yet again

describe Jesus fulfilling His earthly ministry, culminating in His sitting down at the Father's right hand, now actively working on our behalf.

This is so important that the author draws attention to it five times, which is the number of grace. It could be said that the book of Hebrews hangs on Christ's ascension on the 40<sup>th</sup> day and what has happened because of it.

We've seen enough that we could conclude at this point, and maybe some of you are wishing we would. But there is one more piece that I find inspiring and I believe you will, too. Please turn with me to Revelation 5.

Just for some context, the previous chapter is entirely a vision of God's throne. That is the focus of chapter 4—the throne and the One who sat on it. But what is significant is what is not described. There is no mention of Christ at the Father's right hand, or of Christ's throne, or of Christ ruling with the Father on His throne. It is just the Father and His throne.

Now, in Revelation 5:1, there is a mention of the Father's right hand, but it is not at all like what we have seen to this point:

**Revelation 5:1** And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

In John's vision, instead of Jesus seated at the Father's right hand, there is a scroll in His right hand. Some of you will remember a Forerunner article published in 2018 called "[Worthy to Take the Scroll](#)." That article went through this chapter and looked at the other mentions of scrolls in Scripture, and observed that this scroll has the characteristics of a title deed. It appears to be the title deed to all things. We saw in Hebrews 1:2 that the Son was appointed Heir of all things. This scene, then, is about the Lamb's worthiness to redeem all things and inherit the whole creation.

As we read through this, keep in mind what we saw in Daniel 7. I propose to you that this vision in Revelation is a magnification of what happened when

the Son of Man ascended and was brought before the Father, resulting in the Father giving Him dominion and glory and a kingdom. Notice how well it matches up:

**Revelation 5:2-14** Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

The opening of the seals in the following chapters represent steps in the process of His enemies being made His footstool. He is waiting for the sounding of the seventh trumpet, when

**Revelation 11:15-18** . . . there [will be] loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones [will fall] on their faces and [worship] God, saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Truly, Christ’s ascension was a harbinger of great things to come. God’s plan took a tremendous step forward on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, when Jesus was brought to the Ancient of Days, where He has been waiting, as a Priest on His throne, while sitting at the right hand of God.